

THE connexion

Inspiring stories from the Methodist Church



OPEN-AIR FAITH

The **Methodist** Church



Welcome! Are you new to church, an occasional or regular churchgoer, or someone who visits (or is thinking of visiting) a Methodist building for another reason? Or perhaps you've been passed this magazine by a friend or neighbour? Whatever your circumstances, *the connexion* is for you.

Featuring stories from and about real people whose lives have been impacted by the work of the Methodist Church, this issue is sure to encourage and inspire you on your own faith journey.

As spring brings more opportunities to spend time in the open air, we hear from people who are experiencing God's love as a result of local churches taking their activities outside of their buildings. On the Lincolnshire coast, a chaplaincy service is connecting with residents and tourists in and around caravan parks, while in Radyr, Cardiff, a forest church is providing families with the freedom and space they need to explore God's creation hands on. Meanwhile, a Hampshire congregation is taking church to their community by hosting an outdoor party.

July will mark the 50th anniversary of women being ordained as presbyters (ministers) in the Methodist Church. Three women explain what brought them into ministry and how being ordained as presbyters has changed their lives.

Continuing an emphasis on changed lives, we hear from a woman who has benefitted from a bereavement course designed for people struggling to come to terms, years later, with the loss of a loved one. We also find out how a group of craft enthusiasts is lobbying politicians in order to create a better future for their city's residents.

Wherever you are in your own life and on your own faith journey, it's our hope that you will gain a sense of God's amazing work as you read about the people and projects featured in these pages.

Rachel Dalby
Editor

What is the Connexion?

Methodists belong to local churches and also value being part of a larger community. In calling the Methodist Church in Britain 'the Connexion', Methodism reflects its historical and spiritual roots.

In the 18th century a 'connexion' simply meant those connected to a person or a group – for instance, a politician's network of supporters. So when people spoke of "Mr Wesley's Connexion" they meant followers of the movement led by John Wesley, one of the founders of the Methodist Church.

Wesley believed that belonging and mutual responsibility were fundamental Christian qualities.

The language of connexion allowed him to express this interdependence, developing its spiritual and practical significance in the organisation and ethos of his movement. Both language and practice are important for Methodists today.

Go to methodist.org.uk/theconnexion to change your order for *the connexion*, or to download the pdf.

Tell us what you think about this issue: theconnexioneditor@methodistchurch.org.uk

The main purpose of *the connexion* is to share inspiring and informative stories about the impact of the work of the Methodist Church in Britain. If your Methodist church or project has a great story to tell, that can be told through the voices of your community members, we'd love to hear from you. As magazine space is limited, story ideas submitted may be developed for other Methodist Church publications. Please email: theconnexioneditor@methodistchurch.org.uk

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Deacon Pam Luxton on Skegness Pier as part of her chaplaincy work with caravan park residents and holidaymakers (see pages 6-7)

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Revived chapel wins awards

A rural chapel that was once at risk of closure due to dwindling attendance has won two accolades in the National Church Awards.

Providence Methodist Chapel at Throwleigh, on Dartmoor, Devon, won the awards in the Open To Visitors categories for England and the UK.

The small congregation has been working hard over recent years to grow its membership and restore its place in the community. As part of their plan, they decided to stage an exhibition of work by local renowned photographer Chris Chapman. With the help of grant funding, the exhibition attracted thousands of visitors.

The congregation has since expanded its outreach by welcoming pilgrims, hosting more events, and engaging with the community – ensuring the chapel is now financially stable and thriving.

The Revd Chris Jackson, Superintendent for the West Devon Methodist Circuit, said: "Providence Chapel is an incredible success story of how small rural churches can have such a big community impact."

Resources editor retires

The editor of resources used by churches across Britain to plan worship sessions has retired after nine years.

Martin Adams (pictured), who became editor of Roots Adult and All Age in 2015, originally worked as an engineer and then as a writer and trainer in the computer industry. Ordained into the Church of England, Martin then worked in theological education for ten years before joining Roots.

He said: "My work with Roots has been challenging and demanding at times, but also greatly rewarding. It has been an honour and a privilege to serve in this role."

Roots, a partnership of Christian organisations and church denominations including the Methodist Church, has been publishing weekly worship resources since 2002.

The incoming editor, Tracey Messenger, has a background in Christian publishing as a commissioning editor and as a producer of worship resources for Christian charities.

Information about Roots resources can be found at rootsforchurches.com





Rescuing stolen lives

Human trafficking continues to grow globally, with over 100,000 cases identified annually. While most abducted men and boys are trafficked into forced labour, the women and girls (the majority of those trafficked) are primarily victims of sexual exploitation. Raja Moses shares a story of hope.



Raja Moses is Project Manager of the Anti-Human Trafficking Project run by the Diocese of Durgapur in Kushmundi.

Social stigma and fear of reprisal often prevents relatives from reporting missing loved ones, so it's not known exactly how many people are abducted every year. However, the reports that are logged, along with the discovery of victims, points to South Asia – including India – as a trafficking hot spot.

It was with this in mind that northeast Indian tea plantation labourer Pabitra was filled with dread when he arrived home from several weeks of working away to find his 17-year-old daughter, Aporna, missing.

Having excitedly looked forward to reuniting with Aporna, he found himself walking through his front door into every parent's worst nightmare – a missing child.

Pabitra explains: "It was two days before

the local celebrations of Durga Puja – a Hindu festival that is, among other things, an occasion for reunion and rejuvenation. I started searching for Aporna in all the places possible, including her friends' places, but I couldn't find a clue to her whereabouts."

Abductor

Incredibly, after a few days, Aporna managed to telephone her father from the place she had been taken to by her abductor.

Pabitra says: "My daughter was weeping on the end of the phone. She was very frightened. She told me that she was in Amritsar, 1,000 miles away from our home in Kushmundi in West Bengal, near the border with Bangladesh. I was deeply shocked when I realised she'd been taken so far away."



Villagers gather as part of an anti-trafficking awareness day

Aporna told her father that her abductor was violent towards her and was moving her from place to place. Pabitra knew it would be impossible to go alone to rescue her.

Service to God

Thankfully, Pabitra had heard about the Anti-Human Trafficking Project (ATP) run by the Diocese of Durgapur in Kushmundi. Part of the Church of North India, a Partner Church of the Methodist Church in Britain, the diocese launched the initiative in 2011 in the belief that service to God extends beyond the confines of church.

The project, which serves people regardless of their own faith, aims to prevent human trafficking and to protect vulnerable people through training, awareness and the provision of safe accommodation. Its multi-faith team (designed to communicate with all religious communities) also helps victims and their families, who are often too afraid to approach the police themselves and don't know how the law works, to report abductions.

Pabitra got straight in touch with Tulu Murmu, a lay preacher who is a supervisor at the ATP. Tulu was able to help Pabitra to lodge a police complaint and trace the phone number that Aporna had called from.

Police enquiries

The landlord of the house where Aporna was being held heard about the police enquiries and ordered the abductor to leave. Hearing of this, and being concerned that her father would never find her if she was moved again, Aporna started to scream and refused to be moved.

Afraid that he himself may become implicated in the crime, the landlord then called Pabitra, telling him to come quickly

to fetch his daughter. Not knowing what condition Aporna would be in, Pabitra and Tulu began a train journey of over 24 hours.

Much to everyone's relief, when they reached the Amritsar house they found Aporna and were able to take her home.

Pabitra says: "I was so thankful to have Aporna safely back where she belonged. I will forever be grateful to Tulu, the ATP and the Diocese of Durgapur for their actions."

Blessed

Tulu adds: "We were very blessed with this outcome, and feel proud that, through our project's intervention, we were able to rescue and save the life of this girl. Sadly, we have more complicated cases on our books, and we continue to work on these."

As a result of Pabitra and Aporna's experiences, their community now keeps a record of people who work away from the village so that there's an awareness of the vulnerable family members left behind.

The Diocese of Durgapur has also taught the area's children and young adults about the dangers of human trafficking. It continues to stage mass awareness campaigns and runs network-building programmes to strengthen links between locals and officials.



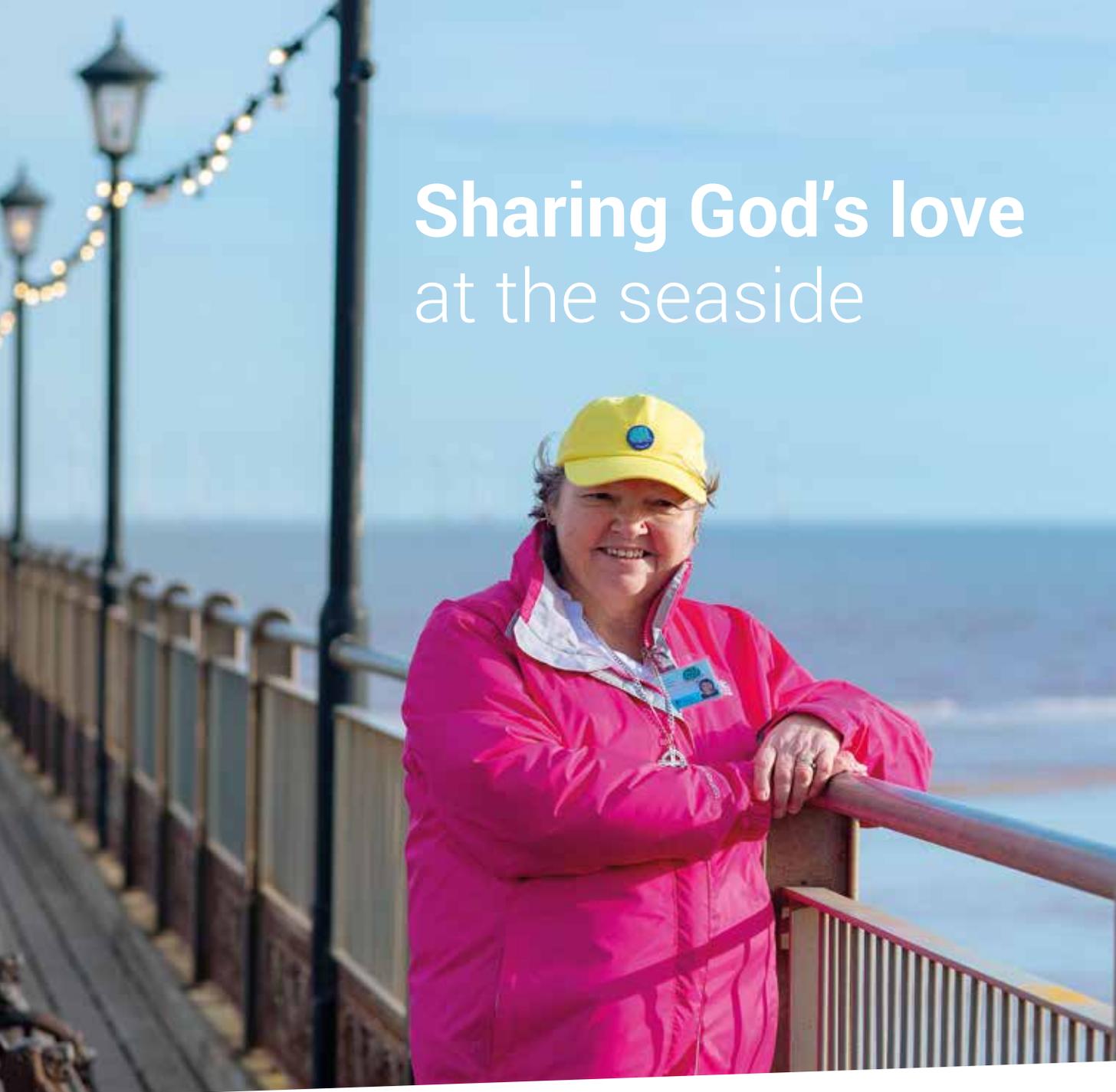
Pabitra (left) and Tulu after rescuing Aporna



I was so thankful to have Aporna safely back where she belonged.

The Diocese of Durgapur is part of the Church of North India, a Partner Church of the Methodist Church in Britain. Raja, along with the Bishop of Durgapur, the Rt Revd Sameer Khimla, confirmed the value of the partnership during a visit to Methodist Church House, Westminster, in the autumn. The visit included talks with members of the Global Relationships team, which facilitates, maintains and develops relationships between Partner Churches throughout the world and the Methodist Church in Britain.

Sharing God's love at the seaside



A chaplaincy team set up to serve people living and holidaying in caravan parks is gearing up for its busiest year. Deacon Pam Luxton explains why demand is growing, and how the service is rising to the challenge.

Deacon Pam Luxton is lead chaplain at Capela Caravan Chaplaincy in the East Lincolnshire Circuit. She is also a wife, mother, mother-in-law and grandmother who enjoys singing, swimming and knitting.

When I first met park home resident Sandy, her husband of 55 years had just passed away. Having cared for him for ten years, Sandy was suddenly facing life alone and so was grateful for the listening ear of a chaplain.

She and her husband had settled in their East Lincolnshire coast park home 16 years ago, soon after their retirement.

Her husband, in particular, had been drawn to living near the sea because he'd previously worked in submarine construction.

Sandy was really happy to see me when we first met, and we've been meeting for a friendly chat ever since. Sandy (78) reminds me: "Meeting you, Pam, has also led to me going along to some of the activities you run in the local area, and

this has helped me to meet new people and make friends.”

Another resident our chaplaincy team visits regularly is Richard (82), who, having retired to the coast from the West Midlands, sometimes misses friends and relatives back ‘home’.

Richard tells me: “I really enjoy the chaplains’ company. I value their friendship, especially in the winter when I don’t go out so much.”

The average age of people who live year-round on caravan parks means that there are many people like Sandy and Richard, in need of a friendly face – especially in the winter. There are, of course, also lots of residents who continue to enjoy an active retirement as part of a couple, as well as singles who’ve chosen caravan life for various reasons. Whatever their situation, most park home-dwellers love this lifestyle while finding that it can also bring challenges, including less social interaction during the quieter months.

Listening ear

This is one of the reasons why Capela Caravan Chaplaincy was set up by the East Lincolnshire Methodist Circuit, with connexional funding, in 2019. Offering a listening ear, pastoral support and signposting, our chaplains are there for residents when they need us, and we can also help people to reconnect with their community.

But residents aren’t the only group of people our team (currently comprising eight voluntary chaplains) supports. With the East Lincolnshire coast ever popular with tourists, another important part of our work is being on hand for people holidaying in static caravans over the spring, summer and autumn.

Engaging

The number of caravans on our patch has increased significantly, to over 37,000, since our chaplaincy started, so we’re expecting to be busier than ever this year. We’ll be walking round the holiday parks and engaging with anyone who wants to have a chat. It’s a great way of taking our Christian love out into the wider community.

I usually drive the chaplaincy’s van, bought with National Lottery funding, to visit the different sites. It’s a converted people carrier with a sink and small seating area, and carries fold-up tables and chairs for use at small gatherings including a Good Friday get together.

As lead chaplain, working full-time, I host



Park home resident Sandy welcomes Deacon Pam Luxton for a chat

weekly Zoom meetings for the chaplaincy team, and attend Caravan Park Watch meetings hosted by park operators and run by the police. This is a good way to connect with people working in the tourism and leisure industry.

I’m always happy to give talks to church groups, and part of my role, to meet the growing demand for our service, is to encourage and train volunteers from all church denominations to become caravan park chaplains. I run a twice-yearly seven-week *Chaplaincy Everywhere* training course, so far undertaken by 18 people.

Prior to becoming a Methodist Deacon, I mainly worked in administration, so this has been a very different role for me. A few years ago, I felt strongly in my heart that God wanted me to work in ministry, and so, after a period of prayer and discernment, I undertook ministry training and started my first role in 2014.

My post as lead chaplain in East Lincolnshire is part of a five-year plan to build Capela Caravan Chaplaincy into a self-sustaining volunteer-run service, so I’ll be stepping down later this year. I’ll miss the work terribly, but this will mark my tenth anniversary of active ministry, and it feels like the right time for me and my husband to move back to North-West England to be closer to our family.

I hope that the chaplaincy will continue to go from strength to strength because it’s such a valued and treasured community service.



This has helped me to meet new people.

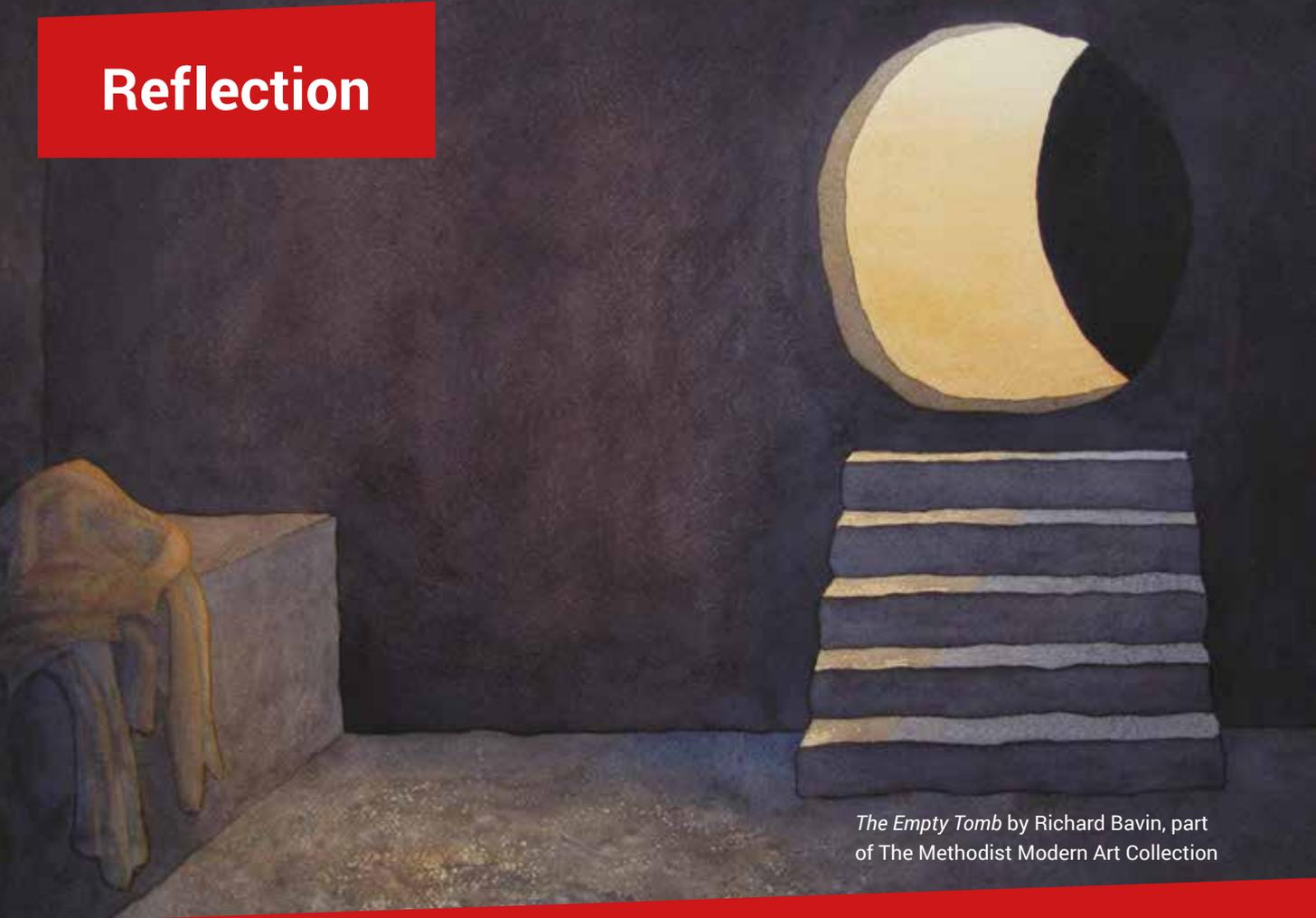


It’s a great way of taking our Christian love out into the wider community.



Richard and Deacon Pam

Reflection



The Empty Tomb by Richard Bavin, part of The Methodist Modern Art Collection

Following the evidence to the **risen Christ**



As a scientist, I was taught to look for evidence and then follow where that leads.

Easter is a wonderful time to think about the Christian story, about our experiences in life and how all of that shapes our faith, writes the Revd Rod Hill.

I sometimes wonder what it would have felt like to be one of the disciples of Jesus on that first Easter Sunday in Jerusalem. Well, I guess they wouldn't have known it was Easter Sunday really, would they?

I wonder what it would have felt like to have all of the hopes and dreams you had been putting in the prophet from Nazareth brought to a crushing end by his humiliating death on a cross.

I wonder what it would have felt like if you had been one of the women around the

Cross on that awful Friday, and then were in the garden, where Jesus had been buried in a tomb carved out the rock, just a few days later.

Empty tomb

I wonder what it would have felt like if you had been Peter or the Beloved Disciple (not named in the Bible), running towards the empty tomb on the Sunday – the first Easter day.

I wonder what it would have felt like if you had been Thomas, the disciple left out of the gathering in the Upper Room (where the disciples often met), when Jesus appeared to

them despite having been executed. Have a look at this, from the book of John:

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'
(John 20:24-25, NRSVA)

What would it have felt like for 'doubting Thomas', or 'Thomas who asked the question', as I like to think of him? What would it have felt like to have not been part of that?

John continues:

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'
(John 20:24-28, NRSVA)

Personally, I've always had a soft spot for Thomas. You see, having been trained as a scientist, I was taught to look for evidence and then follow where that leads in order to test an idea. It seems to me that this is what Thomas did. He wanted to see the evidence.

Of course, we will never know (at least not in this life) what it felt like to be there, in and around Jerusalem, at that time. But we can, if we're so minded, follow the evidence.

Down the centuries, countless millions of people have had their lives transformed by what they see as an experience of the risen Christ, and I'm one of them!

It was Easter Day, 1979, and I was sitting in church as the bread and wine of our Communion service was brought around, as usual, for people who weren't able to walk

to the front to receive it. As the minister brought the very ordinary-looking bread and wine across the church, it was suddenly transformed before my eyes. On that Easter morning, I saw Jesus himself standing in front of me! I still get goosebumps, 45 years later, when I think about it.

Meeting with Jesus

As you would expect, I've talked about this experience several times since, and some people have said "you were imagining it" or "it's just coincidence". For me it wasn't any of those things. It was one of the many 'God-incidences' I've experienced in my life, and I've followed where the evidence of those moments, and others, have led.

I wonder at my meeting with Jesus in that ordinary Methodist church all those years ago. I wonder, and I follow where the evidence led me.

I can't know what it felt like to be Peter, or Mary, or Thomas, or any of the others who were there on the first Easter Day. But I know what it feels like to me to be a disciple of the risen Lord Jesus. We all can!

We can all meet with the risen Christ on Easter Sunday, or any other day of the week for that matter. We can meet Christ in a church in the countryside, in the suburbs or in the city. We can meet with him, and we can, with Thomas, say "My Lord and my God!".



We can meet Christ in a church in the countryside, in the suburbs or in the city.



On that Easter morning, I saw Jesus himself standing in front of me!



Born in Sheffield, the Revd Rod Hill was a science teacher before being ordained in 1990. He has since served with churches in East Yorkshire, London and Sheffield, and has been Mission Enabler for the Liverpool and then Manchester and Stockport Districts. Before retiring, Rod was a circuit superintendent in Sheffield.

Are you curious about the Easter story, and would like to find out more? Visit methodist.org.uk/LoveAlways to watch our Easter video and discover more resources.

Golden milestone for women's ministry



Pastoral care: the Revd Kan Yu checks in with people at the end of a service

In July, the Methodist Church will celebrate 50 years of women being ordained as presbyters (ministers). While women had previously been accredited as local preachers and ordained as deacons, they were not ordained as presbyters until July 1974. At that time, the Church was the largest denomination to take this step. Three ordained women share their stories.

The Revd Kan Yu is a presbyter (minister) in southwest London. She was born and brought up in Hong Kong and now works with Hong Kong migrants living in London.

When I told people I was considering training for ordination, their jaws dropped. My family and friends were all really surprised when I shared my news with them. I have to say that, at first, I couldn't believe that I felt called to that role, either! I'm an outgoing person, and my original trade was in the hotel industry. I'd focused on public relations and marketing, so my previous life was fairly glamorous, talking to journalists and so on. Becoming a minister didn't match the image of how I had been.

I was accepted for training in 2013 and was ordained in 2017. In June 2021, I started work with a group of around 60 people which has now grown to 250, many of whom have settled here from Hong Kong. We have weekly services on Sunday mornings in a room at a local football club. The aim is to worship God and to connect with one another, not just speaking Cantonese, but to also integrate with, and contribute to, the wider community.

The women who were ordained before me were pioneers. I felt I was asked by God to be a minister of the Methodist Church because the Methodist spirit has always been a pioneering one.

Inspirations

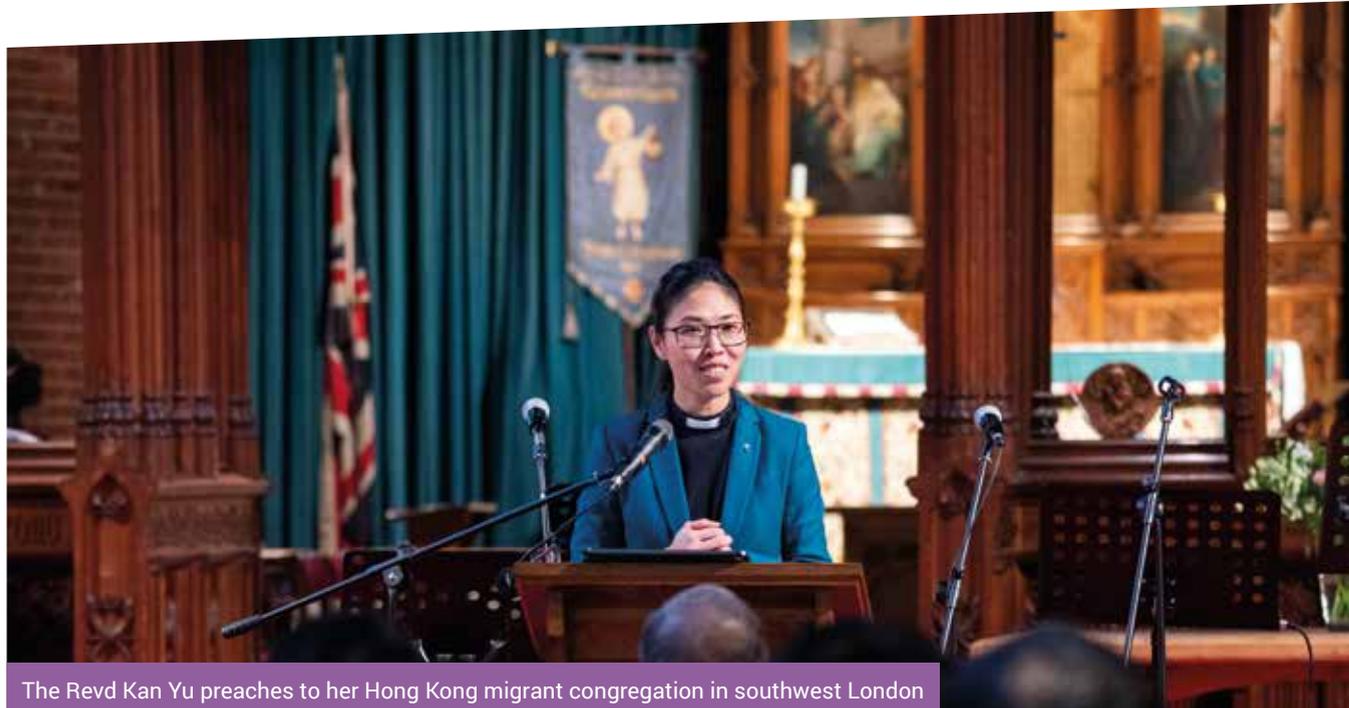
As women in ordained ministry, we're not alone. God is walking with us, of course, and there are so many other women who have walked before us. There are many examples and inspirations for the female presbyters of today.

I feel strongly that women should stay open and alert to what God wants us to do, and often think of these words from the Bible:

Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.
(Romans 12:2, NRSVA)



I knew in my innermost being that I was going to be a minister.



The Revd Kan Yu preaches to her Hong Kong migrant congregation in southwest London



*You know
God has used
you to make a
difference in
someone's life.*



The Revd Kathryn Stephens greets members of her congregation

The Revd Kathryn Stephens is a superintendent minister in the Stoke-on-Trent Mission Circuit, working at Swan Bank Church. Kathryn was born in 1974, the year women were first ordained as presbyters in the Methodist Church.

I was 21 when I started thinking about church ministry. I had just got a job working in a Methodist church in North Yorkshire. I learnt my trade in that church. It was just one of those 'God appointments' – the right place at the right time – and I realised that God was calling me to ordination.

A key moment during my ministry journey was when I set up a church on a housing estate and spent time with the people who attended that church. Whenever it came to having communion, we had to bring in an ordained minister, yet it would have felt like the most natural thing for me to be breaking the communion bread. That challenged me to think "what is my calling?" and "what are the next few years going to look like in terms of serving God and the Church?".

Supportive

I come from a really supportive family, and they saw my trajectory before I did. I remember one New Year's Eve, chatting to a person who worked in banking. I mentioned that I was exploring becoming a minister, and he told me to make sure there was a really good pension plan. I replied that that wasn't part of the deal!

I was ordained as a presbyter in 2004. My work now consists of a variety of things,

including conducting funerals, weddings, baptisms and dedications. We are very much a community-focused church, so there's lots of work supporting people who are homeless and/or have mental health problems and/or addictions. Some people in our community, and in our church, have complex needs.

It feels significant that I share the year of my birth with the first Methodist women's ordinations. I'm glad, and very proud, to be part of a trailblazing church.

Challenges

While I feel that women's ordination should have come sooner than it did, I'm also mindful of the challenges encountered by women in denominations where their ordination is not welcomed, accepted, or seen as legitimate. That feels very sad to me.

I am a feminist, so whenever I see women speaking up and finding their voice, stepping into their calling and fighting for equality, I think that's really important.

At the end of our church's last Christingle service, a man who's fairly new to church told me: "You know when you see someone and they're just in the right place? That's you!". In these moments, when you feel like you connect with people, you know God has used you to make a difference in someone's life.



The Revd Kathryn Stephens leads a service at Swan Bank Church

The Revd Michaela Youngson is the Assistant Secretary of the Methodist Conference. As part of the Connexional Team, she carries out work that the Conference has asked the Church to do. Prior to her current role, she was District Chair in London.

It was a very sudden moment when I realised I was being called to become a presbyter. I was 16 and attending a Methodist Association of Youth Clubs event at London's Royal Albert Hall. Onto the stage came a very elegant woman wearing a clerical collar, and I just thought: "Oh, that's what I'm going to do". I knew in my innermost being that I was going to be a minister.

Until that point, lots of women lay preachers had visited our local church, but the only ministers I'd ever seen were men. Seeing that woman on the stage at the Albert Hall made sense of everything I felt about wanting to talk about God, and about loving the Church and wanting to be part of that story.

Idea

Over the years, it was clear to me that the idea wasn't going away. While I'd started work in the aerospace industry, it wasn't long before I was working for the Church.

In 1992, I applied to train for ministry and was accepted. That year, the Methodist Conference was held in Newcastle, where I was living at the time, and the Revd Kathleen Richardson became the first woman President. She preached at my local church and I had this overwhelming sense of joy and anticipation that this was the Church I was going to be part of – a Church that would put a woman into its most senior leadership role.

In 2018, I became the sixth woman President of the Methodist Conference, and that was very exciting.



The Revd Michaela Youngson

I've always been really proud of the Methodist Church. I think we try very hard to be inclusive, to recognise everybody's value and their value to God, and the Church provides a platform to speak into situations of injustice. We don't always get things right, so we have to keep working on that.

Explore

If you feel a sense of calling, explore it. Of course, there are practical issues for women and men that need to be taken into account, but there's always a way around these if God is truly calling you. If you can be yourself and accept that you're following God's call in obedience and love, then it's the most wonderful life to be part of the Church.



I've always been really proud of the Methodist Church.

Vocations Sunday, on 5 May, offers an opportunity to reflect on how each of us may participate in God's work. The challenge is to discern God's voice, and to consider if we, ourselves, are being called towards developing and sharing our skills within the Church. This could be in any one of a wide variety of roles. For more information, and resources for a Vocations Sunday service, visit methodist.org.uk/Vocations



Crafting a fairer future

For the first time in decades, large numbers of wildflowers are sprouting in Leeds city centre, bringing joy and a sense of natural regeneration. Reporter Anais Pedron finds out about the initiative behind this much-needed rewilding.



I felt craftivism offered a different flavour of activism.

Anais Pedron is a media officer for the Methodist Church in Britain.

Passionate about social and environmental justice, Anna Bland (31) wanted to make a difference in her local community that would have a wider reaching impact. But, having seen several activist friends suffer burn-out, and coming close to that herself in the past, she felt there had to be another way.

She says: "I'd heard about craftivism – combining craft and activism – and how its mix of creativity, contemplation and action could bring community members together to effect change.

"I felt craftivism offered a different flavour of activism that embraced the full humility of the people doing the crafting, but also the power holders we are hoping to influence."

After meeting with two kindred spirits, the three launched their first craftivism campaigns in 2019, with the focus on climate justice

and, in particular, working for a greener and fairer future.

Part of Leeds Sanctuary (formerly Leeds Methodist Mission), a collection of city centre projects run by the Yorkshire West Methodist District, the Leeds Craftivists group has since grown to around a dozen members. They meet monthly to hear talks from experts, chat about issues that concern them, and, after a short meditation, make pieces of art by crocheting, knitting, drawing and painting.

Kind

"The beautiful items we produce are sent, with letters explaining our views on a particular issue, to local council members to call on them to vote for change," says Anna. "One of our principles is that we believe that if we're hoping to build a kinder, more gentle world, then our actions must be kind and gentle too."



Members of the Leeds Craftivists display their blanket highlighting the cost of living crisis

Craftivism – activism through craft – is unmistakably linked to social justice. The Methodist Church is a justice-seeking Church with initiatives and campaigns ranging from climate justice and our commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2030 to offering warm spaces to those in need during the winter. We are also supporting Methodist churches that want to gain Church of Sanctuary status for their work with migrants.

Rachel Lampard, the Methodist Church’s Director of Social Justice and Social Action, says: “Craftivism is a practical and gentle, yet powerful form of activism. It has helped people to have true conversations with MPs and has changed minds and policies. It’s about building relationships with those we’re crafting alongside as well as with those who have power.

“Through the act of creating, sitting with others, talking about what matters – or just being silent – craftivism enables lament, confession, restitution and hope. We don’t have to be expert crafters to join in. The creativity flowing within us all connects deeply with our longing for God’s justice. For Christians, craftivism can be a form of prophetic witness.”



Some of the handcrafted bees sent to MPs to call for a pollinator corridor



If we’re hoping to build a kinder, more gentle world, then our actions must be kind and gentle too.

Some of the craftivists’ larger projects have included a blanket designed to highlight the impact of the cost of living crisis on local people and how the issue links to sustainable energy. Before being sent to the council, the blanket was displayed in various Leeds venues to raise wider awareness.

Biodiversity

A key focus of the craftivists over the past year has been biodiversity. Members had noticed that, while parts of Leeds, with their new developments and emphasis on green spaces, were good places for wildlife, some of the longer-established areas of the city seemed to have been forgotten.

The group swung into action, launching a campaign to raise awareness of the importance of providing habitats for wildlife, and calling on the city council to plant wildflowers to support insects and birds.

Bees

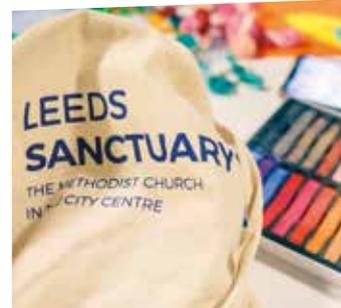
Linking to the RSPB’s Attack on Nature campaign, calling on national Government to protect biodiversity, the craftivists invited

local people to craft two bees – one to send to their local MP, and the second to contribute to the craftivists’ local campaign to create a pollinator corridor in Leeds city centre.

Anna says: “Leeds City Council were really receptive to our campaign, and it wasn’t long before wildflower seeds were being planted across the city! With the council’s permission, community members were encouraged to plant seeds, which they could obtain from us.

“Looking after our pollinators is vital, and so this feels like an important step in the right direction of making Leeds City Centre the richly biodiverse place we all want it to be.

“Of course, increasing flowers and pollinators is hugely beneficial to people’s well-being, and our work always connects with social justice, which is an important part of being a Methodist.”



The Craftivists are part of Leeds Sanctuary (formerly Leeds Methodist Mission)

Children celebrate the opening of 3Generate 2023



Listening to young Methodists

Today's young people will inherit our Church, our society and the world that's currently being created, so it's right that we should have a say in what our future looks like, says Methodist Youth President Thomas Hart.



Thomas Hart (19) lives in Lincolnshire and is the 2023/2024 Methodist Youth President. It is his job to ensure that the voices of children and young people are heard throughout the Methodist Church and beyond.

As Youth President, it's my role to meet and listen to young people in all Methodist walks of life and to be an advocate for those who want to be heard.

The Church's programme for children and young people spans ages 4 to 18, which is a huge age range, so we find age-appropriate ways to talk with them, ensuring everyone has a voice.

Since taking up my post, I've already had some amazing discussions as I've visited church events and youth projects. For example, I had an in-depth conversation with a 14-year-old about the difference between 'multigenerational' and 'intergenerational' groups and activities. I felt she showed great

insight when she told me: "It's great when adults want to be intergenerational, but they are sometimes tokenistic in their actions".

The Youth President is elected each year by people attending 3Generate, the Methodist Church's annual children's and youth assembly. It's a full-time paid job that lasts for one year.

God was calling me

I applied for the role after feeling that God was calling me, and fellow church members in Grimsby, Lincolnshire, gave me some friendly encouragement.

I was thrilled and daunted when I was elected, as it's a huge responsibility.

The Church's young people have put their trust in me to serve them and to walk beside them during their journey of discovery and exploration of faith.

I was brought up as a Methodist, attending church with my parents, and became a church member at 14.

Friendship and a sense of community make me who I am. I enjoy chatting with people of different faiths and with no faith. I'm always keen to share the Christian message – that Jesus died on the Cross so that, if we say sorry for the bad things we've done and become his followers, we can have an eternal life in God's kingdom.

Overseas visit

I love music and travelling, and both of these passions are currently proving useful. I've already visited many youth groups, including in the East Midlands and Cumbria, and on the Isle of Man. I've also undertaken an overseas visit, as is traditional for the Youth President.

I visited the Evangelical Methodist Church in Argentina. Experiencing a different place and culture really put some perspective on my life in Britain.

During my trip, I was able to share my love of music, which provided common ground with many of the people I met. I played the organ at Primera Iglesia Evangélica Metodista, a Methodist church in Buenos Aires which is home to one of the country's largest church organs. I also got to play my trumpet with other musicians.

I visited some Argentinian Methodist schools and spoke with the young people who, like ourselves, are keen to create a truly inclusive space for people to come to know Christ. It was a tremendous experience.

3Generate

While there's lots in my diary beforehand, I'm starting to look ahead to 3Generate 2024, which will be held from 4 to 6 October at the NEC in Birmingham. Not only will this be the largest event in the Methodist children and young people's calendar, but by attendance it will be the biggest event in the life of the whole Church this year!

More than 1,300 young people, supported by 400 adults, attended last year, and the scale of this really needed to be seen to be believed.

3Generate is great fun, with arts and activities, and features many expressions



A 3Generate worship session



Methodist Youth President Thomas Hart at 3Generate



It's my role to meet and listen to young people in all Methodist walks of life.

of worship. There's also space in the venue for more traditional quiet prayer.

The things we discover from the people who attend 3Generate feed into the Methodist Conference, where all the big decisions are made. Young Methodists' concerns often reflect those of wider society. We are particularly worried about the state of the environment, poverty, people's mental health and issues around diversity.

A major theme that emerged from the 2023 event is that young people are proud to be Methodists and want to take their Church and their faith into their communities. Once we've explained this to the Conference in June, assuming that the report is accepted, the Church will consider how it better equips its young people as disciples.



3Generate is great fun, with arts and activities, and features many expressions of worship.

3Generate 2024 at Birmingham NEC is open to young people aged 8 to 18, along with 4 to 7-year-olds accompanied by a parent/carer (in a specially allocated space). Booking enquiries should be sent to: 3Generate@methodistchurch.org.uk



The Revd Judith Holliman is half-time Minister at Radyr Methodist Church and half-time Pioneer Minister (paid for by connexional funds) in Cardiff Methodist Circuit.

Worship in the woods

With fresh air, the connection with nature, and space for people to express themselves, outdoor churches are growing in popularity. The Revd Judith Holliman explains why forest church has become an essential part of worship in her community.

When a parent and child arrived at one of our traditional services for the first time during the pandemic, it quickly became clear that the containment of conventional church, layered with the restrictions in force at the time, wasn't going to work for them. In fact, seeing the newcomers struggle to fit in helped us to realise that many of us were ready to try something different.

As a pioneer minister, I'm always looking for ways to engage with more members of our local community. On my visits to a new housing estate, I'm a regular walker through an area of woodland on the edge of our village, Radyr, near Cardiff. The 14-acre wood has a play park, beautiful scenery and a stream – perfect for getting families, couples and singles of all ages together.

Opportunities

Recognising the opportunities in the beautiful outdoor space, I invited everyone who had the slightest connection with church, along with others who hadn't (via social media and notices in a local shop window), to join together for a relaxed afternoon in the woods. Forest church was born.

It was so easy. We simply turned up and, because we were blessed with a dry day, laid out some blankets. We had some ideas for conversation starters, along with a few simple activities to engage the children.

Now, a couple of years on, our forest church congregation has grown, and several parents take turns to lead the monthly afternoon sessions. One mum has led musical walks, another is an excellent storyteller, and another – a teacher in a forest school – brings amazing ideas to the group.

Excitement

We've held several special events, including a pumpkin party and a Shrove Tuesday forest church (which ended up with us back at the manse for pancakes). During the winter (when it was getting dark early), we had a star-gazing session. We set up telescopes and one of our church stewards came along to share her knowledge of the planets. There was great excitement (and not just among the children) when we lit a firepit and toasted marshmallows!

The key aim of Radyr Forest Church, part



Toasting marshmallows during forest church

of Cardiff Methodist Circuit, is to provide an accessible, inclusive and relaxed environment for families interested in spirituality and Christianity but who wouldn't normally come to a conventional service. This means that while the things we do are rooted in Scripture, they're done in a way that appeals to people at all stages of their faith journey.

Flexibility

Forest church is a bona fide way of engaging with and worshipping God. Indeed, for many, Radyr Forest Church is their primary, if not only, church. Maintaining flexibility during sessions and providing plenty of opportunities for people to see and hear God in the things around us is essential.

Hannah, a regular attender, told me recently: "I love that Radyr Forest Church allows children to be their loud, busy, energetic selves – something that can be stifled in a formal church setting. They can learn, first hand, about God and creation while having the freedom to behave in the way that they were created to."

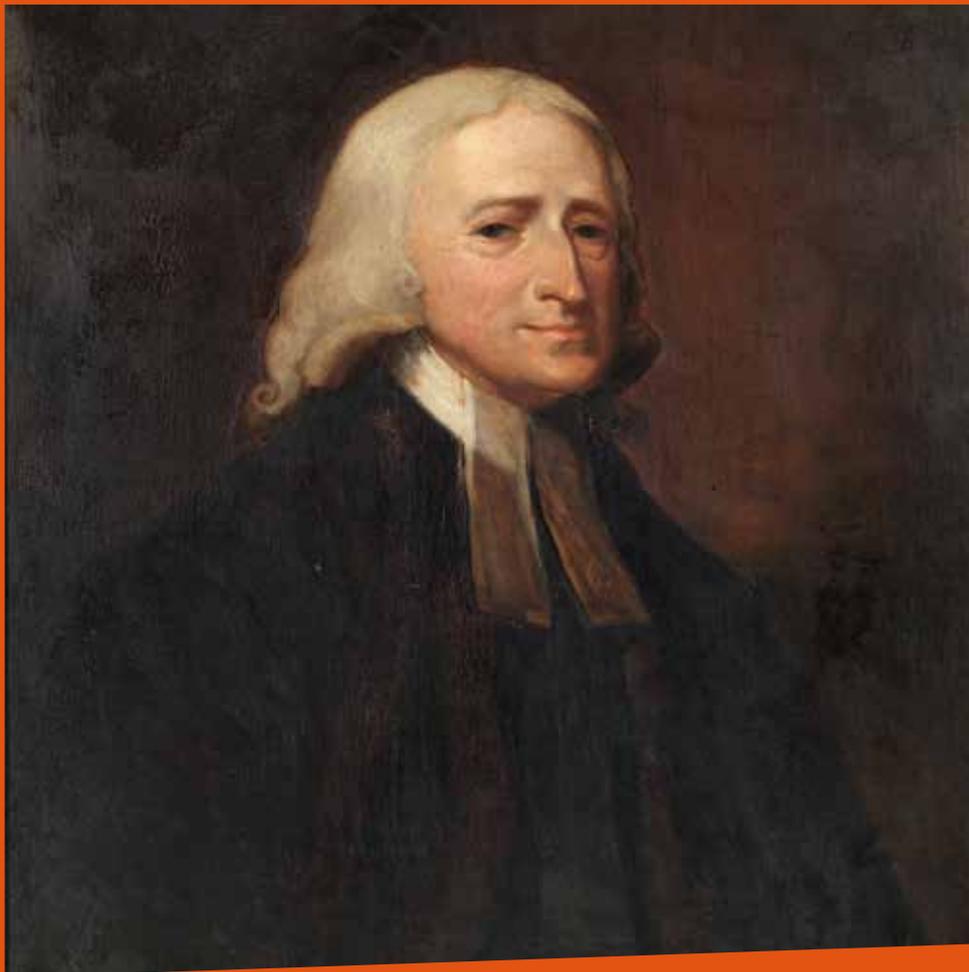
For other churches considering launching an open-air congregation (which can meet anywhere – not just in a forest), I'd say go for it and hold it lightly so that the Spirit can dance through it without being constrained by any set ideas. Oh, and also get a really great risk-assessor who's prepared to go along and experience the joy and keep everyone safe without being overly rigid.



Young people imprint pieces of cloth with nature's colours



Forest church is a bona fide way of engaging with and worshipping God.



A copy of George Romney's 1789 portrait of John Wesley painted by Kate Gray (Charles Wesley's great-granddaughter).



Wesley was a highly effective leader who created a successful movement.

Remembering our roots



John Wesley championed a living faith.

Is an annual day to celebrate our Church founders still important? Martin Wellings thinks so.

My first appointment after Bible college was to serve in a South Midlands Methodist circuit, where one of my responsibilities was chaplain to a Boys' Brigade company. Every Monday evening, we met in a village chapel vestry, where the boys were both fascinated and frightened by a picture on the wall. It depicted an elderly man in black with long white hair and a very serious face. The boys didn't know who he was, but he definitely made them feel uncomfortable.

The picture was a portrait of John Wesley, and the reaction of those boys says much

for the way Methodists have responded to Wesley's image and influence.

In the Methodist calendar, 24 May is kept as Wesley Day, and the closest Sunday is known as Aldersgate Sunday, with special Bible readings for us to use in worship. But why do we do this when no other branch of the Christian family makes so much of its founder?

Effective leader

Part of the answer is that Wesley was a highly effective leader who created a successful movement and controlled it for a long time.

When spiritual renewal began to influence the churches in Britain in the 1730s, John Wesley was just one of a number of leaders of what became known as the Evangelical Revival.

Gradually, the group led by John and his brother, Charles, established a separate identity. This small band of preachers and local groups (called 'societies') grew into Wesley's 'Connexion' (the network of all those who followed Wesley), and he governed it with a blend of charisma, tireless supervision, and a degree of ruthlessness.

Point of view

Wesley outlived his rivals and colleagues, dying in 1791 aged 88, so he was able to shape the Connexion over the first half-century of its existence and ensure that its history was told from his point of view. When we read extracts from John Wesley's Journal, we do well to remember that it wasn't his private diary, but an account written for publication, putting Wesley's spin on the history of Methodism.

In the years after 1791, the Methodist movement grew tremendously, becoming the largest of the English Free Churches and the largest Protestant Church in the USA.

The movement also fractured into half-a-dozen competing connexions, and, in this family squabbling, it became important for all sides to claim that they were the true heirs of John Wesley. So Wesley's sermons, methods of organisation, and hymns (mostly by Charles, but sometimes altered by John) continued to shape Methodism through its Victorian and Edwardian heyday, both in Britain and in the USA.

Celebration

Curiously, though, while British and North American Methodists marked the centenary of the first Methodist open-air preaching in 1839 and the centenary of John Wesley's death in 1891, Wesley Day didn't become part of the Methodist calendar until 1924, and the real celebration of John Wesley's evangelical conversion at a meeting in Aldersgate Street on 24 May came only with the bicentenary in 1938.

Historical circumstances only tell us part of the reason for Methodists continuing to commemorate Wesley Day and Aldersgate Sunday. Is it still important? I think it is!

First, the Wesleys' understanding of the gospel still rings true. The Wesleys believed passionately that the message of God's life-changing and world-transforming love in Jesus Christ was for everyone. This inclusivity distinguished the Wesleys' Methodism from other strands of the Evangelical Revival, and it drives a commitment to share the good news of Jesus with everyone.

Our Methodist history underpins modern initiatives, including the Church's 'God For All' strategy. It also informs our commitment to be a justice-seeking Church, because, for Wesley, the gospel embraced social change as well as personal renewal. Through Jesus, God brings forgiveness and peace to individuals, but also personal and social well-being.

Cheerful

Second, the Wesleys' spirituality still has much to teach us. John Wesley championed a living faith – not "a train of ideas in the head", but "a disposition of the heart". An inner sense of the love of God made the early Methodists characteristically cheerful – it made them sing!

Methodists' faith was scaffolded by rhythms and practices which supported the spiritual life – personal prayer and Bible reading, fellowship, the worship and sacraments of the Church, and putting faith into action through just and generous living. Present-day resources like A Methodist Way of Life – 12 practices that Methodists think particularly help us to encounter God – draw their inspiration from John Wesley.

Wesley Day offers us much to celebrate and much to learn, for the Church of today and tomorrow.

Resources for churches planning Aldersgate Sunday services are available at: methodist.org.uk/AldersgateSunday

More information about living A Methodist Way of Life is available at: methodist.org.uk/MWOL



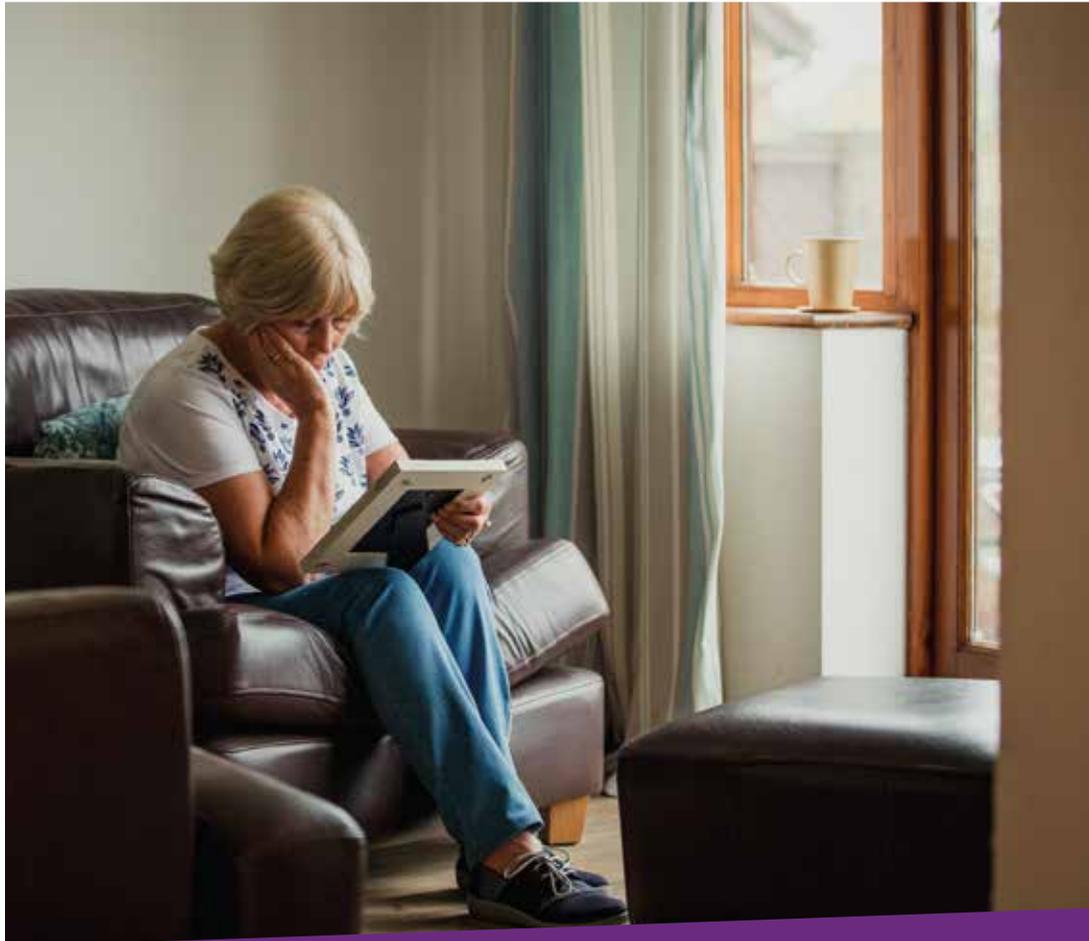
Martin Wellings is Superintendent of the Barnet and Queensbury Methodist Circuit in North London. History has been Martin's lifelong enthusiasm, and his latest book, *Methodism in Victorian Oxford*, published by Oxfordshire Record Society, was published in summer 2023.



Our Methodist history underpins modern initiatives.



Grief is something that walks beside bereaved people every day.



Providing space to heal

Grief walks beside bereaved people every day, and, if we can learn how to manage it and honour the person we miss, we can find some form of positivity from something that is incredibly sad, writes Sylvie Nicholls.



Sylvie Nicholls is a supernumerary (retired) deacon in the Chorley and Leyland Methodist Circuit. She is trained in coaching and pastoral counselling, and is currently studying for a Diploma in Pastoral Supervision. Her book, *The Treasure on the Shore*, is available from Amazon.

“My father died suddenly, in front of me, 70 years ago, but I only realised recently that I’d never properly grieved for him,” explains Diana Hall.

“I was actually in the midst of grieving over the loss of Ian, my wonderful and kind husband of 50 years, when I realised that I hadn’t worked through the earlier loss of my father, Frederick.

“I remember that our local Methodist church was packed for my father’s funeral as he was a highly thought of man, having

been a school headteacher and a Methodist preacher and circuit steward.

“Although I was just seven when he died, I still think of him often, and, whenever I look at a photograph of him, I’m always reminded of our similarities. Each year, on the anniversary of his death, I place flowers in a vase next to his photo on my side table.”

It was during a series of bereavement group meetings at Leyland Methodist Church in Lancashire that Diana spoke for the first time about the impact of her father’s death.

“One particular session, titled ‘However Long Ago the Loss, Questions Remain’, gave me a safe place to talk about the shock of seeing him die, at just 54 years old, and helped me to see, for the first time, that grief is a common denominator in human life,” she says.

“The meetings were well prepared and sensitive, and one of the coping mechanisms suggested to members was to find a quiet place and allow ourselves to be at peace. I’ve since done this every day and I find it helps me so much,” adds Diana.

I organised the sessions as part of a course, *Hidden Treasure*, that I developed and was piloting at the time. I’m now hoping that other Methodist churches across Britain will run the course so that more people can benefit from it.

Personal experience

Having, myself, been widowed twice and written a book, *The Treasure on the Shore*, about my personal experiences of loss, I designed the course as the result of being convinced that questions I had wrestled with would resonate with others.

Years ago, after I preached a sermon in which I mentioned losing my first husband, Ray, when I was just 28, a woman shook my hand and thanked me for telling the congregation about him. Tears pricked my eyes as the woman asked me more about Ray. I remember it clearly, as it was so rare for anyone in my life then to refer to that earlier loss or to encourage me to share my memories.

Responses

Since then, there have been occasions when I’ve overheard someone tentatively begin to talk to a neighbour or friend about a past loss – sometimes from years before. Whenever I heard responses like “but that was a long time ago” I would inwardly wince. I would think to myself that all that was needed were a few kind words and a chance for the bereaved person to talk more about their loved one, regardless of how long ago their loss was.

I feel strongly that grief is something that people don’t get over. Grief is something that walks beside bereaved people every day, and, if we can learn how to manage it and honour the person we miss, we can find some form of positivity from something that is incredibly

sad. That’s the ethos behind the *Hidden Treasure* bereavement reflection course.

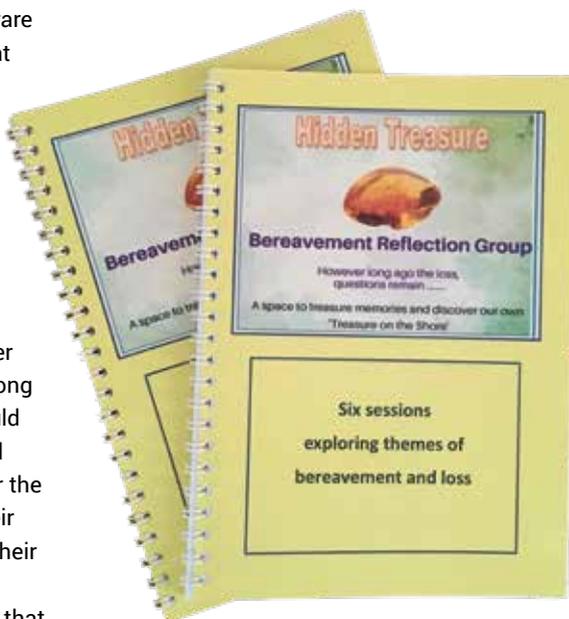
Mutual support

While the sessions offer mutual support, the emphasis is on reflection and providing a safe space in which people can acknowledge the impact of a loss and honour their loved ones. The hope is that members can discover some ‘treasure’ that may have been previously overlooked. This is often best attempted when at least a few years have passed since the loss, enabling a wider perspective than in those first months when our grief will be raw and all-consuming.

Understanding the pressures placed on busy church leaders, I designed the course to be easy for them to run. Consisting of six weekly sessions, minimal preparation is required and no prior training is necessary for leaders.

Each session includes a simple activity designed to get people thinking and chatting, followed by a short reflection and a few questions to stimulate further conversation.

You know, in any group like this, the real treasure lies in the members themselves, who offer comfort and share wisdom from their own lives while respecting that each person’s experience of grief is unique.



Diana Hall found the bereavement meetings helpful



I only realised recently that I'd never properly grieved for him.



The hope is that members can discover some 'treasure' that may have been previously overlooked.

Church leaders who are interested in running Sylvie's *Hidden Treasure* bereavement reflection course can find more information at the Facebook page, 'Treasure-bereavement-course'.

Aiden learns about planting seeds into 'good soil'



Al fresco **faith**

Instead of prioritising attracting newcomers into their building, a Hampshire congregation is focusing on taking church out into their community. Martin Letts explains.

Our congregation came up with the idea of turning church ‘inside out’ a few years ago, and we haven’t looked back!

Mindful that most of the Bible stories about Jesus record him ministering and telling stories to people outside of the synagogues and temples, we decided to concentrate our resources for newcomers on an annual day of providing hospitality out in the community.

With just 28 members, Bishop’s Waltham United Free Church, in the Meon Valley Methodist Circuit, isn’t a large church. However, by calling on our various talents and asking friends to help, our Faith al Fresco day was born in 2013. It’s been running ever since (with a break for the pandemic), and we’re now seeing around 100 people at each event.

Fun

While our first Faith al Fresco was a modest affair, with a few children’s games and crafts, a prayer tent and, of course food, we’ve since significantly developed the event with all age groups in mind. The food element hasn’t changed – we still offer bacon butties and cake – but we’ve put a lot of thought into running activities along a theme designed to be fun and of interest to everyone.

For anyone who wants to wander into the free event, held on a grassy area in the grounds of Bishop’s Waltham Jubilee Hall, we lay on hospitality with a capital ‘H’. This means ensuring that people feel looked after, well fed and loved. Church members and stewards are around to chat with visitors, explore questions of faith and help in any way we can. Our superintendent minister, the Revd Phil Griffin, and local Church of England vicar, the Revd James Hunt, along with a few local Methodist preachers, also mingle with visitors.

Bumper day

Staging the event in the May half term holiday (when the weather tends to be good, and many people are available) really works for us, and we’re hoping that this May’s event – on the theme of Who is My Neighbour? – will be another bumper day. We’re currently busy adding the finishing touches to our props.

Last year’s theme, Remember the Rainbow, required a large wooden Noah’s Ark. This was designed and built at home, and then re-assembled on-site (watched by fascinated children), by church member Tom Banks. The structure was strong enough to withstand the



Faith al Fresco visitors act out the Noah’s Ark story



Church treasurer Andy Hallam (left) and church member Tony Norman cater for visitors

combined weight of several children!

Things got a bit chaotic at one point, but it was great fun as we acted out the story of Noah and his family with the help of the Bible Society’s *Open the Book* resources. The children pretended to be animals and members of Noah’s family, and, at the end, a dove flew over and the rainbow (painted onto cardboard) came out and fulfilled God’s promise to us all.

Craft tent

Other attractions included an ever-popular bouncy castle, and a craft tent where children made animal masks which they were then able to wear for the story. For people who just wanted to relax, we provided plenty of chairs and blankets.

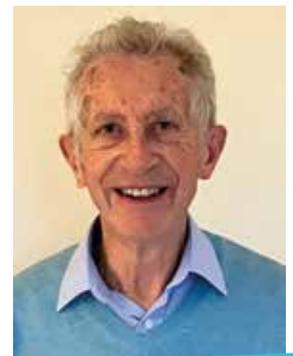
We’d invited the local media and were blessed with a visit from a BBC Radio Solent reporter who recorded lots of interviews and featured them in her following Sunday’s broadcast.

Another theme that worked well back in 2022, was the Sower and the Seeds, based on the Bible story of the farmer whose scattered seeds (which represent the word of God) fall onto different types of ground (a metaphor for the different types of people who hear God’s word).

A lot of hard work goes into Faith al Fresco each year, but we feel it’s a brilliant way of building community, encouraging others and talking about Jesus in a relevant way.



We’re now seeing around 100 people at each event.



Martin Letts is a circuit steward in the Meon Valley Methodist Circuit and supports Bishop’s Waltham United Free Church, a joint Methodist and United Reformed Church congregation. Married to Jill with two adult daughters and two grandchildren, Martin is a retired Chartered Engineer who enjoys writing and taking part in amateur dramatics.



Learning to **welcome everyone equally**

A new thought-provoking course has been launched to help Methodists ensure that everyone in church feels equally welcome and safe. Lynda Johnson (77), who was among its first students, explains how it's impacted her.



Lynda Johnson is a member of Central Methodist Church, Hucknall, Nottinghamshire, and is a lay preacher and member of the safeguarding group in the Nottingham North East Circuit.

I think we've all been brought up to do and say things in certain ways, and, to us, our way feels like the 'right' way so we don't normally question how our words and actions affect others.

In church, too, we've traditionally tended to have set ways of saying and going about things. So, when we're with people in church, our established behaviours are probably not going to seem like they're anything to worry about. At least, that's what I used to think!

I've recently taken part in a pilot for a course designed to help Methodists to think through how behaviours that may seem 'normal' to us as individuals may not be seen in quite the same way by others. The course, which I undertook with other members of my church housegroup, encouraged us to reflect on our words and actions and consider if we could reframe them to be more thoughtful and inclusive.



Central Methodist Church housegroup members take part in the new training course

Meeting for four weekly sessions, our group of seven (ranging in age from 51 to 86) unpacked some of the most common things that we say and do in church settings. This was to help us understand that our words and actions are often loaded with meaning for others and can be a source of unintentional hurt.

Alarm bells

During the course, *God Welcomes All – How Faith Informs Safeguarding*, we watched video testimonies from people who have survived various forms of abuse. Suddenly I could ‘hear’ alarm bells ringing in my head, because it dawned on me that the way I say and do things can have a huge impact.

Take, for example, those times when those leading services (including myself) ask everyone to greet each other in Jesus’ name, and people rush towards one another to shake hands or hug. Watching the survivor-testimony videos made me realise that there may well be people among us who, for very important reasons, don’t want to have physical contact with others.

Sweeping generalisations

And how about the times when we use sweeping generalisations, make assumptions and address everyone as though they were the same, when they’re not? While it may seem impossible to always cater for every single individual’s needs and characteristics, the course showed us that it’s not hard to say things in a way that enables everyone to feel included and loved.

Working through the course helped our group to see that it’s our duty, as Christians, and in our DNA as Methodists, to be as

thoughtful as we can in our everyday practises so that we can truly welcome everyone into church and provide a safe space. Of course, this is an essential part of our church safeguarding work – something we see as being part of the Bible, not an add on.

While this doesn’t mean that, now we’ve studied the course, we’re all going to get everything right all of the time, the key is for us to have developed an increased awareness so that we can do better. Hopefully, with practice, new ways of doing and saying things that are more sensitive and inclusive will become natural.



The key is for us to have developed an increased awareness so that we can do better.

It’s the Methodist Church’s intention to value every human being as part of God’s creation and the whole people of God. At the heart of the Methodist community is a deep sense of welcome, hospitality and openness, which demonstrates the nature of God’s grace and love for all.

Our church communities are called to be places where the transformational love of God is embodied, and life in all its fullness is a gift offered to all people. Everyone has the right to protection from abuse and to be treated no less favourably than others, irrespective of any personal or protected characteristic.

As part of our work to uphold these principles, the Church is inviting all Methodists to undertake our new course, *God Welcomes All – How Faith Informs Safeguarding*. Designed with small group study in mind, the course’s four sessions include prayers, questions for discussion, short films and reflections to guide participants through the everyday issues around safeguarding in church.

More information about the Church’s commitment to safeguarding, along with online versions of the course booklet and facilitator’s guide are available at methodist.org.uk/TheologyOfSafeguarding. Print versions of the course booklets are available to order from methodistpublishing.org.uk



Vivien Almond is a Methodist local preacher and a survivor of abuse. She is a member of the Methodist Survivors' Advisory Group and features in the Church's *God Welcomes All – How Faith Informs Safeguarding* resources.

Understanding changes words and actions

Abuse survivor Vivien Almond features in the Church's new training resources, *God Welcomes All – How Faith Informs Safeguarding*. She explains why she believes all Methodists should take part in the course.

It's not about upsetting people. It's not about telling awful stories and having to listen to horrible things. It's about learning that being a survivor of abuse is very different. And that, actually, we can make our churches much more welcoming to everyone if we understand that the people who walk through our doors all have different experiences and needs.

Not everyone in church wants a hug. Not everyone wants to sit in the middle of the row. Some people want to sit where they can see an escape route. If other people can understand this, church is going to be much more welcoming.

I offered to feature in the new training resources because I have been abused within the Church. And because, sadly, in my experience, most people in churches think that six weeks of counselling solves everyone's problems. What people often don't understand is that when someone is abused their whole outlook on life changes.

Local churches

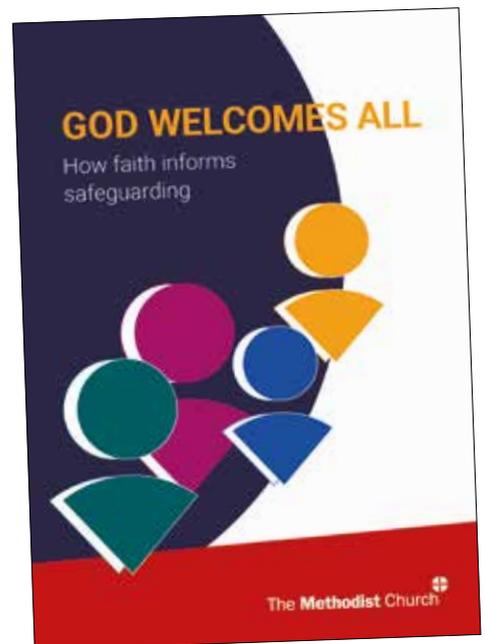
People in senior Church positions can improve safeguarding policies, and they can promote strategies for churches to be more welcoming. But if the culture is really going to change, that has to happen in local churches – and it has to involve everyone, including you!

We need to reach a point where all Methodists understand what being a survivor of abuse is like. Let me tell you, it does not mean there's anything wrong with us. It means that, having gone through the things

we've gone through, we'll be different. Some of us have been abused as children, some as adults, some outside the Church and some within the Church. Some of us have been abused by people in positions of authority, and some of us by our parents.

Some actions and words in church can be hurtful to people who have been abused. The Church's new course teaches people about what it means to be a survivor, so that participants can show more understanding.

Please don't say "this isn't relevant to our church" or "people have just got to forgive and move on". Ask your church leaders to run the course for your congregation.



When someone is abused their whole outlook on life changes.

The Church's charter for survivors and policy and guidance for working with victims and survivors, along with a supporting guide to this document written for victims and survivors, is available at: methodist.org.uk/Safeguarding/Support-for-survivors

Soldier becomes **Methodist** local preacher

Joe Navoka has become the first member of the Armed Forces to graduate from a new Methodist local preacher training programme. Mike Ivatt explains.

Joe, who is a Company Quartermaster Sergeant in the British Army, began his faith journey as a young man in Fiji, where he was raised in a Methodist household. Keen to join the military and explore the world, he enlisted in 2000.

He explains: "Coming to the UK as a 'military migrant' gave me the opportunity to write my own story by embracing the secular lifestyle that Western society provided. However, I quickly realised that my calling was undeniable and that God hadn't allowed me to travel too far from the humble roots of my family's faith.

"Our calling as Methodists is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ by living out its discipleship in worship and mission. I decided that I wanted to do this through becoming a local preacher."

Tailor-made

It was then that Joe heard about the Armed Forces Local Preacher Scheme, which offers a tailor-made training route that factors in the unique challenges faced by people in the military.

Joe says: "Service personnel frequently move location and find it difficult to juggle employment, family, ministry and studies. This new scheme provided me with a wonderful opportunity to answer my call as a disciple of Christ while still serving as a soldier."

Coordinated by the East Solent and Downs Methodist Circuit in Hampshire, the training features the same elements of the traditional local preacher course. The difference is that each student is allocated a tutor who ensures they have a mentor available as they



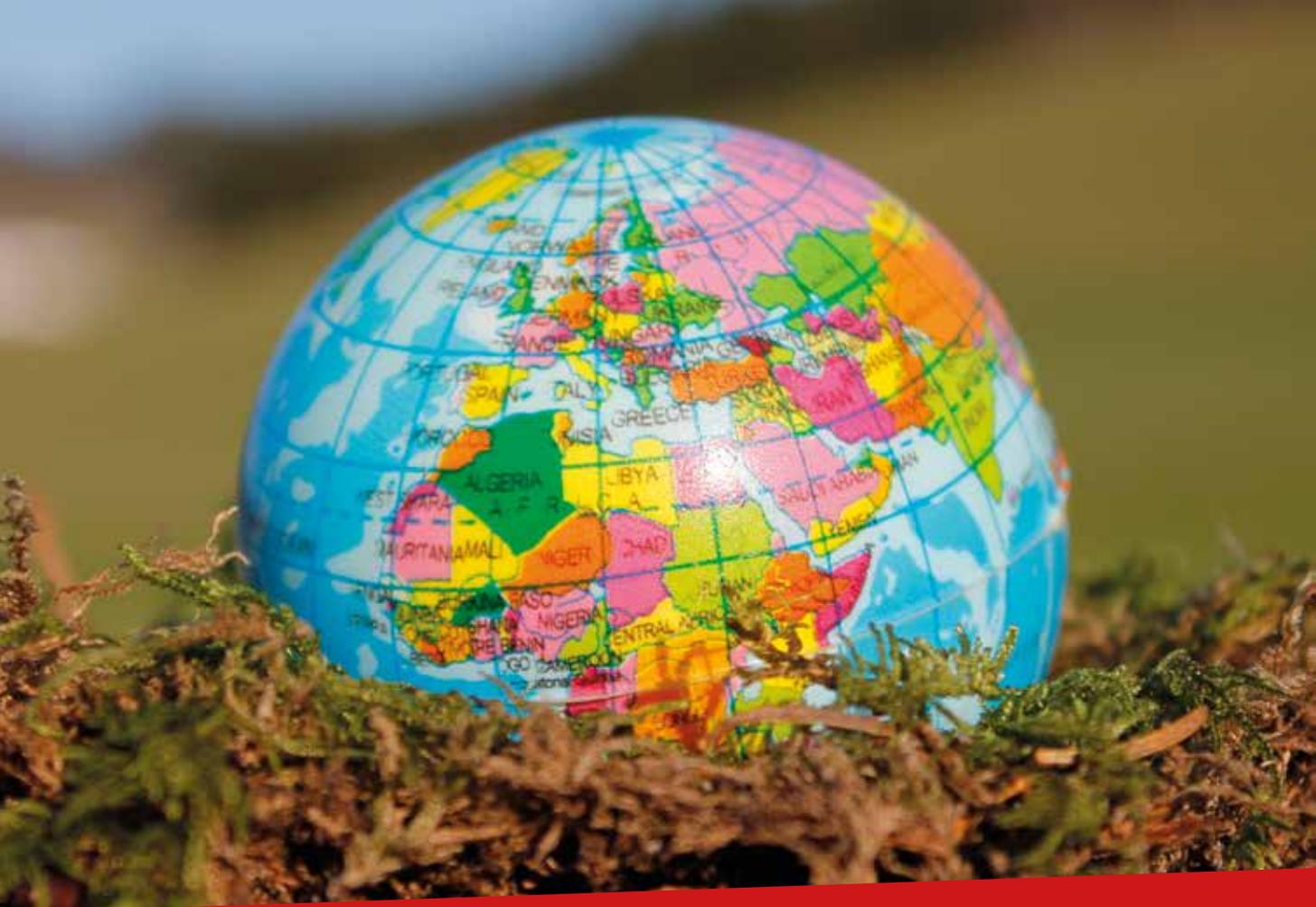
Sgt Joe Navoka on duty with the British Army

move around different Army garrisons, RAF stations, Navy bases and ships. In addition, the observations and assessments that local preachers must undergo during training can be held in military locations.

Joe said: "My faith has been well received by the Army. In the military we are exposed to experiences and emotions that you don't often find in civilian life, and soldiers are more spiritual than many people realise. Faith has played an important role in keeping my coworkers morally and ethically grounded when faced with some extremely challenging situations."

Joe was admitted as a local preacher during a service at Castle Methodist Church, Colchester.

Mike Ivatt is the Methodist Church in Britain's Lead Media Officer.



An offering for the world



Andy Fishburne is the Methodist Church in Britain's Discipleship and Faith Formation Officer.

Methodist Women in Britain, a justice-seeking charity, organises an annual Easter Offering – a service and collection which raises money for the Church's World Mission Fund. Andy Fishburne asks Ruth Parrott about the meaning behind this year's theme, Let Justice Roll.

Andy: Ruth, please introduce yourself and explain your role in Methodist Women in Britain, and the history of the Easter Offering.

Ruth: I'm the Co-Chair North of Methodist Women in Britain (MWiB) and I work in tandem with Maggie Woods who is Co-Chair South.

The Easter Offering tradition began in 1883, when women in Manchester collected £32 for missionary work overseas from 'Christmas pennies' at family gatherings on Christmas Day.

The Women's Work Committee of the World Methodist Missionary Society thought that Easter would be a more appropriate time and so they asked women to raise 'a penny a head'

which would be dedicated in a circuit service.

In 1884, the Church's London districts distributed Easter envelopes and collecting bags asking for a penny a head, and collected around £100. The Easter offering collection has continued ever since, and in 2023, we raised over £190,000, thanks to the generosity of Methodists across Britain.

Andy: Can you explain the meaning behind the theme for this year's Easter Offering?

Ruth: Methodist Women in Britain's strapline is 'for women, for justice, for Christ'. The theme for this year's service, 'Let Justice Roll', is based on this Bible verse:

But let justice roll on like a river,
righteousness like a never-failing stream!
(Amos 5:24, NIV)

MWiB has been working closely with the Walking with Micah project, which helps the Methodist Church in Britain to focus on our principles and priorities for justice. We know that there are many instances of injustice in the world today, and that God calls us to ongoing awareness and action. Amos 5:24 reminds us that God's justice is not finite, but instead rolls forward, gathering momentum as people work for justice and their actions feed into communities and lives.

Andy: The Gospel passage for the Easter Offering service is Luke 18, verses 1-8 – the Parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge. What made you choose this text?

Ruth: When we see or are presented with examples of injustice, God says we should have a passion for justice and should act. The Unjust Judge only acted for a selfish reason, so that he would not be bothered again. We must act when we see injustice as we are charged with doing God's work in the world.

Andy: What do you admire about the widow in the story?

Ruth: The widow was persistent and she persevered until she got the answer she wanted, and justice was done. She set a precedent and achieved what had seemed impossible. We must be like the widow and challenge authority, persisting until we get a result.

Andy: It's sometimes assumed that the judge character represents God, because he is powerful and male, and therefore matches the expectations of a patriarchal society. What do you think about this?

Ruth: We must not liken God to an unjust judge. We must be careful how we read the Bible and not interpret Scripture to justify behaviours and opinions. We believe we are all made in the image of God and that all are equal in God's eyes.

Andy: What lessons can we take from this parable for our lives today?



Ruth Parrott, Co-Chair North of Methodist Women in Britain

Ruth: This parable challenges ideas and provokes thinking. The widow was clearly in need. The original listeners would have been well aware of 'unjust judges' in the society of the time. Jesus was pointing out that the woman, through her persistence, was vindicated – a modern day parallel to the case of the 'Post Office Workers', perhaps?

'Let Justice Roll', the Easter Offering 2024 service, tells stories of people standing for justice, persisting in the face of setbacks and taking up the challenge anew as circumstances change. Some stories show how people now have hope because justice has 'rolled' into their lives.

As Christians we're called to seek God's justice. Justice that enables everyone, and all creation, to flourish. Justice that removes everything that diminishes people, that oppresses or exploits them. Justice that enables us all to grow in relationship with each other and with God.

To learn more about the Methodist Church's justice-seeking principles, priorities and practices, visit methodist.org.uk/justice



More information about Methodist Women in Britain's 2024 Easter Offering, along with

resources for local churches to take part, are available at: methodist.org.uk/EasterOffering

LET JUSTICE ROLL

**Easter Offering
Service 2024**

**“The support has
really helped me
and I thank God...”**

**Take a fresh stand for
justice by giving an Easter
Offering to support the
World Mission Fund.**

Elizabeth suffered injustice and exclusion because she is disabled. But thanks to the **World Mission Fund**, Elizabeth's local church in Tanzania supported her. Now she earns enough to buy food – and she's included in her community.

By supporting the **World Mission Fund**, you'll help the Methodist Church to stand alongside churches like Elizabeth's so more people are treated with justice.

Scan the **QR code**
or visit
**[methodist.org.uk/
EasterOffering](https://methodist.org.uk/EasterOffering)**



**Methodist Women
in Britain**

for women, for justice, for Christ

The Methodist Church 